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Problems in the Reconstruction of the Ottoman Empire

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IT is a matter of deep concern—this story of the Ottoman Empire and what is to become of that country—not only to us who live in America, but to all the world, at least to all the civilized or European world, because during the past two centuries, if not longer, every European war has had its origin or its cause in that Ottoman Empire. Greed upon the part of one or more of the great European Powers for territory, or for some advantage or gain, has brought about this result, and I do not except this last war.

HISTORY OF THE TURKISH DOMINATION

When the Turk, hundreds of years ago, began his forward and ever victorious march from Central Asia westward, conquering one nation after another, one people after another whose inferior he was in civilization and in all that goes to make up a great people, he swept over the following lands one by one: Egypt, Syria, Armenia, Palestine and Lebanon. He was not even halted by the Straits or by the Bosphorus, but finally crossed into Europe. Five hundred years ago, he drove from Constantinople the Greeks who had ruled there for hundreds of years. So successful was that onward march of the Ottoman Turk, so wonderful was the progress he made, that he came to the very doors of Vienna before he was finally stopped. Then, after centuries, there began the period of retrogression. The Turk, while he may be a conqueror, has failed signally to be a real administrator. He has failed to understand the theory or the practice of government—not only of his own people, but of those nations which he has conquered. So we find today that there live in what is known as the Ottoman Empire some 20,000,000 people, among whom are nations within a nation, peoples within a people, countries within a country—people diverse in thought, in language, in ideas, in ideals, and in all that goes to make up a

nation. Probably about 5,000,000 are Ottoman Turks. The great majority have little or no education—ignorant, illiterate, mostly peasants or workingmen, simple-minded, peaceful, intensely superstitious and pious or religious. A few, perhaps a hundred thousand, are men of education, men of culture, men of refinement, men who possess the European manner and the European education. These few thousands, until this war came, were the rulers of the land. They dominated the affairs of the country. They were the spokesmen of the Ottoman Empire. Between these two extremes of the Turks—between, on the one hand, these few thousands of men who held all the positions of trust in the government, and the Turkish peasant and workman at the other extreme—came all of the rest of the peoples of Turkey, the peoples whose ancestors made up the nations which Turkey conquered. Millions were Arabs who, like the Turks, were Moslem in their religious belief, but who had little or nothing to do with the Turks and seldom if ever intermarried with them. Millions were Greeks who still speak the Greek tongue. There were hundreds of thousands of Jews, some of whom spoke Spanish, or a mixture of Spanish and Hebrew and Turkish. There were Lebanonites and Syrians, descendants of those peoples and nations over which the Turkish army swept; and then there were still probably a million, no one can tell exactly, perhaps a million and a half or two million, of those wonderful people who have withstood such persecutions and such outrages upon them during these past four years that one wonders when one hears the story that any remain alive to tell the tale—those Armenians who are said to be descended from the first of the pagan tribes which accepted the doctrines of Christ and who have suffered for it ever since. Part of Armenia, or what perhaps is real Armenia and in which there now live about 2,000,000 Armenians, was taken by Russia. It is what is called Russian Armenia. These peoples, other than the Moslem Turks of whom I have spoken, stand in between the two extremes of the Turks, and are in theory subject races.

Strange to say, today there is what is called a liberal monarchy in Turkey. Until eight or nine years ago it was an absolute one, dominated by the Sultan. Even the Turk was unable to stand it longer, and there was almost a bloodless revolution during which

they deposed this absolute monarch and placed his elder brother upon the throne; and he ruled only in name until he died a few months ago. He has been succeeded by a younger brother, who now reigns by the permission of the great Powers of the world until it shall be decided what is to be the fate of the Ottoman Empire. The rulers of the land during this period were the members of the Cabinet. Then, gradually, the power came to be placed in the hands of two men of this Cabinet, men whose names are known, Enver and Talat—men who threw their fortunes into league with the Central Empires and who, as the war progressed and after Turkey entered the war in the fall of 1914, were but the agents of the German Emperor. They today are fugitives, and it is interesting to note that it is said that they have gone back to the original home of the Turk, to the far off country of Turkestan, whence the Turk centuries ago began his foray into the civilized world. There, according to the stories that the newspapers tell, these two men are preaching the doctrines of the majority, otherwise called bolshevism, and trying to arouse the people to begin a new campaign against the Ottoman Empire and the countries of that part of the world which we speak of as the Near East.

With a land like that which I have indicated, with peoples of different religious beliefs, tongues and customs, there are, indeed, presented many problems for consideration. It is said that America has a great interest in that land, an interest which has been shown by our sending large numbers of missionaries there and creating and maintaining wonderful institutions of learning. But, to my thinking, our obligation is now to see that those peoples who are persecuted, downtrodden, oppressed, murdered and massacred, shall have that right to live in the sun as all men and women under God have a right to do.

CONSTANTINOPLE

Many plans are proposed. First, there is the great problem of what shall be done with that part of the Ottoman Empire which lies within the boundaries of Europe. There is the wonderful city of Constantinople with its fine harbors—a great port opening the way to all of southern Russia, permitting access to the Black Sea, and on both sides of it a strategic position which all the nations of the earth, except America, have coveted and which all

the nations of the earth, even today, except this land of ours, would be willing, perhaps, to possess. The disposal of Constantinople is one problem.

THE TURKS IN EUROPE

Then it has been said that the Turk, because of the atrocities which the Turkish government has permitted against the Armenians, should be driven from Europe. Now, there are between 700,000 and 1,000,000 Moslem Turks in that part of Turkey in Europe between Constantinople and Adrianople. They have lived there for five hundred years—they and their families. It might be almost as cruel to deport them from that land and from their homes as it was cruel to send out those hundreds of thousands of Armenians from their homes where they had lived for centuries.

Side by side with that suggestion comes a proposition to internationalize, or place under international control, the whole of the Turkish Empire, leaving the land and its peoples as it is. This might permit the working out of its salvation by each nation.

CONFEDERATION OF TURKEY

The next plan which I have seen proposed is one that meets with little favor from any one. It is to make a sort of confederation, as it were, of all these countries—to try to make a kind of a United States out of Turkey, some states to be free, some to be partly free, some to be placed under the guidance or under the protectorate of a great foreign power, all to have some measure of independence—all, I presume, with the idea of working out as time goes by their own independence. For the Moslem Turk himself there would be reserved a new country carved out of Asiatic Turkey, where the greatest number of the Moslem Turks reside.

SYRIA AND LEBANON

Syria, according to this plan, would be semi-independent with France for her guidance and protection. But those of Syrian birth would feel dissatisfied with any guidance or with any protectorate, claiming that they themselves are entitled to be an independent people. Yet France claims certain ancient and inalienable rights, as she puts it, in Syria. Also the Lebanonites, in-

habiting that ancient country of Lebanon, assert the right of independence, and over them, too, France claims certain rights of protection and guidance.

ARMENIA

Armenia likewise claims, with reason and justice, that she should be given, some say, full independence and freedom. Speaking of her history, of her peoples, of her requirements and what she has accomplished, Armenians point with real pride to what their people have become throughout the world, as an example of what they may be able to do if they live under a free government of their own. Some say, however, that there should be a protectorate over that land, and to America many of the Armenians offer this task.

ARABIA

Arabia presents another problem. The Arabians, when the war came, with the assistance of England, proclaimed themselves an independent kingdom and set up a power of their own, and they, too, claimed the right to have a government of their own.

I have thus briefly outlined the story of the Ottoman Empire, its history, the problems of its future. There are other problems—Palestine, for instance, but all these can be solved with intelligence and thought, and solved in such a way as to bring to these peoples the realization of their aspirations for liberty and freedom and justice. We are today turning over a leaf in history which for those peoples of the Near East is momentous. For them the pages of the past have been written in letters of blood. Now we turn for them and for the whole world to a much fairer and a brighter page: the one whereon will be inscribed the victories of peace and the triumphs of the right—the right for which those peoples in that far off land have looked so far in vain. We hope and believe, however, that this time it shall not be in vain.